

Alison Arnold Writes...

The first roads in Duxbury were Indian trails. There were 2 main trails, the western or inland trail north that became the Bay Path, and an easterly way that became the Green Harbor Path. This ran through the east central part of the town from Island Creek to Green Harbor or Marshfield. From it ran many paths along the bay.

Tremont St. developed as a shortcut to the Green Harbor Path, but as late as 1685, it was just a shady foot path. At first it was called the "way leading from Duxbury to Marshfield." Then, after a meeting-house was built on it, it became the "way from the meeting-house to Marshfield." Then it was called the County Road, a more pleasing name than Tremont St.

But by then it had become the fashion to imitate the names of Boston streets, among them Congress, Franklin, Washington and Harrison. However, some of the names of the streets had local origins. For instance, Winsor St. was on land owned by the Winsor family. Water St. led to the water. Shipyard Lane had a shipyard. Were the hundreds of bees around the trumpet vines responsible for Bumblebee Lane? Prior Farm Rd. was once the Prior farm.

Many of the newer streets have picturesque names -- Strawberry Lane, Teakettle Lane, Surrey Rd., Buckboard Rd., etc.

Surplus St. was once just a cart path to the shore where salt hay was cut, a way that was in use in 1637. In early deeds it is referred to only as "the road," but at one time it was called Folly St.

When the almshouse was built on Depot St. near where Surplus St. crossed it, the road was called Almshouse Rd. It was also called Poverty Lane, perhaps because poverty led to the almshouse?

According to Dorothy Wentworth, Duxbury's town historian, the name Surplus St. came about in this way. In President Jackson's administration there was a federal surplus and on June 23, 1836, Congress enacted the Surplus Revenue Act, which provided that the surplus, to the amount of 36 million dollars, be "deposited" with the 26 states of the Union in the ratio to their federal representation. The money was to be paid in 1837, in 4 equal installments, but only 3 were actually made.

Massachusetts' share was \$1,338,173.58 and in January, 1837, the Legislature voted to "deposit" the money with the towns in proportion to their population, to be used for any purpose for which the towns usually spent tax money.

One story is that the Duxbury share was used to improve Surplus St., thereby giving it the name. The other story is that the inhabitants of that road were so much interested in the surplus funds and talked so much about them that the road was called "where those surplus people live."

But Surplus St. it became. And when I give it as my address to strangers, it is met with incredulous looks and raised eyebrows.